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Use of Microelectrode Arrays to Directly Measure Diffusion of
Ions in Solid Electrolytes: Proof of Concept Experiments
Involving Ag$^+$ in a Solid Polymer Electrolyte

by

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ABSTRACT

We report proof of concept experiments demonstrating a new methodology for direct measurement of molecular or ionic species in electrolyte media. A microelectrode array of closely spaced (1.4 µm) Pt microelectrodes (~70 µm long x 2.7 µm wide x 0.1 µm high) allows direct measurement of the movement of Ag^+ in aqueous electrolyte and in the solid polymer electrolytes, $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP (MEEP = poly[bis(2-(2-methoxyethoxy)ethoxy)phosphazene]) at 298 K with a molar ratio of $LiCF_3SO_3$ to polymer repeat unit of 1 to 4 and $LiCF_3SO_3$/PEO (PEO = poly[ethylene oxide]) at 352 K and a molar ratio of $LiCF_3SO_3$ to polymer repeat unit of 1 to 8. The crucial experiments involve anodically stripping Ag from a Ag-coated Pt microelectrode (generator) and electrochemically detecting the resulting Ag^+ at nearby (1.4 to 23.4 µm) Pt electrodes (collectors) by reducing the Ag^+ back to Ag. The time dependence of the collector current corresponding to Ag^+ to Ag reduction after the generation step allows evaluation of the diffusion coefficient, D, for the Ag^+ in the various media and conditions used: $D = 5 \pm 2 \times 10^{-9}$ cm^2/s at 298 K in $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP, $2.3 \pm 0.3 \times 10^{-5}$ cm^2/s in aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ and $7 \pm 1 \times 10^{-8}$ cm^2/s at 352 K in $LiCF_3SO_3$/PEO. For the arrays used $D = 0.22d^2/t_{mt}$ where d is the separation between the generator and the collector and t_{mt} is the time of the maximum collector current.

Use of Microelectrode Arrays to Directly Measure Diffusion of Ions in Solid Electrolytes: Proof of Concept Experiments Involving Ag$^+$ in a Solid Polymer Electrolyte

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ABSTRACT

We report proof of concept experiments demonstrating a new methodology for direct measurement of molecular or ionic species in electrolyte media. A microelectrode array of closely spaced (1.4 μm) Pt microelectrodes (~70 μm long x 2.7 μm wide x 0.1 μm high) allows direct measurement of the movement of Ag^+ in aqueous electrolyte and in the solid polymer electrolytes, $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP (MEEP = poly[bis(2-(2-methoxyethoxy)ethoxy)phosphazene]) at 298 K with a molar ratio of $LiCF_3SO_3$ to polymer repeat unit of 1 to 4 and $LiCF_3SO_3$/PEO (PEO = poly[ethylene oxide]) at 352 K and a molar ratio of $LiCF_3SO_3$ to polymer repeat unit of 1 to 8. The crucial experiments involve anodically stripping Ag from a Ag-coated Pt microelectrode (generator) and electrochemically detecting the resulting Ag^+ at nearby (1.4 to 23.4 μm) Pt electrodes (collectors) by reducing the Ag^+ back to Ag. The time dependence of the collector current corresponding to Ag^+ to Ag reduction after the generation step allows evaluation of the diffusion coefficient, D, for the Ag^+ in the various media and conditions used: $D = 5 \pm 2 \times 10^{-9}$ cm^2/s at 298 K in $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP, $2.3 \pm 0.3 \times 10^{-5}$ cm^2/s in aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ and $7 \pm 1 \times 10^{-8}$ cm^2/s at 352 K in $LiCF_3SO_3$/PEO. For the arrays used $D = 0.22d^2/t_{mt}$ where d is the separation between the generator and the collector and t_{mt} is the time of the maximum collector current.

INTRODUCTION

We have recently communicated a technique which allows the electrochemical determination of the diffusion coefficient, D, of a redox active species by monitoring the time required for a species to move from a "generator" electrode, through an electrolyte medium to a separate "collector" electrode, Scheme I.[1] The critical measurement is to determine the time dependence of the collector current associated with the redox chemistry of the species created at the generator. Equation (1) has been shown to apply to a

$$D = 0.22d^2/t_{mt} \tag{1}$$

geometry of generator/collector electrodes consisting of parallel microelectrodes where D is the diffusion coefficient of the species created at the generator, d is the distance from the center of the generator to the nearest edge of the collector and t_{mt} is the time associated with the maximum in the collector current.[1]

In this report we demonstrate the utility of microelectrode generation/collection techniques to directly measure the movement of ions in solid polymer electrolyte media and to determine their diffusion coefficients. The experimental strategy is summarized in Scheme II. The critical measurement is the time dependence of the collector current corresponding to the reduction of Ag^+ after the pulsed generation of Ag^+ from a Ag-coated generator

electrode, a distance d from the collector. For simplicity we assume Ag^+ movement, however, the actual species moving may be Ag^+, $Ag^+CF_3SO_3^-$, $Ag^+(S)$, or $Ag^+CF_3SO_3^-(S)$ where S is one or more solvent molecules. In any case, we detect the movement of some Ag^+ species from one point in space to another.

Our new measurement techniques complement studies of ionic conductivity by AC impedance, pulsed-field gradient NMR and radiotracer methods.[2,3] Measurements of solid-state ionic conductivity from AC impedance are not always easily interpreted,[4] however the measurements here directly provide data concerning diffusivity. Electrochemical studies to determine D based on steady-state currents of codissolved electroactive species have been made in solvent swollen solid electrolytes.[5] Measurements of the effective diffusion coefficient for charge-transport in a redox polymer have been made using a microelectrode array coated with a polymer.[6,7] In the redox polymer studies, the movement of charge is a diffusion process that occurs via electron-hopping, driven by a concentration gradient between oxidized and reduced sites. Our new results relate to a situation where net physical movement of an ion occurs in a non-electronic conductive media. A significant point regarding our method for determining D for Ag^+ is that the measurement is unambiguous in terms of the movement of the Ag^+, because all Ag is initially confined to the generator and the current measured is due to the reduction only at the

collectors. Our technique can determine diffusion coefficients without knowledge of the concentration of the diffusing species.

Solid electrolytes show great promise in battery technology, in solar energy systems, and in solid-state gas sensors.[8] Solid polymer electrolytes differ from the classical solid electrolytes in that generally they are conductive in the glass phase as opposed to in a crystalline or polycrystalline phase. Since they are generally glasses at operating temperature, embrittlement and delamination do not limit long term durability. Processing of these materials for the construction of odd shapes or sizes is facilitated by their plasticity. Many ionic conducting polymers behave as solvents for ions which have, on a microscopic scale, liquid-like degrees of freedom. Our primary illustration of the direct dynamic movement of ions through a solid concerns the solid electrolyte, $MEEP/LiCF_3SO_3$ at a 1 to 4 molar ratio of $LiCF_3SO_3$ to polymer repeat unit.[9] MEEP, shown in Scheme III, is known to have good ionic conductivity for many monovalent salts at 298 K.[10] We have also studied $PEO/LiCF_3SO_3$ at a 8 to 1 molar ratio of polymer repeat unit to $LiCF_3SO_3$.[11] PEO, also shown in Scheme III, has good ionic conductivity above the melting point of the crystalline phase ($\sim$67 °C) and is the most well-studied of the organic polymer solid electrolytes.[12,2] The structure of both of these polymers include ether linkages separated by $-CH_2CH_2-$ groups analogous to crown

ethers and their linear analogues. The affinity of this class of molecules for alkali metal cations is well documented.[2,4] The mechanism of conduction (diffusion) is assumed to be ion hopping from Lewis base site to Lewis base site in which chain motion is a significant factor.[13] This is inferred from discontinuities in the conductivity-temperature plots near the melting point of these polymers. Our studies provide some of the first data on direct measurement of diffusivity of ions in solid polymer electrolytes. The methodology can be applied to studies to investigate the factors governing ionic conductivity.

EXPERIMENTAL

MATERIALS. The polymers PEO and MEEP were deposited from 1-2% stock solutions based on CH_3CN and tetrahydrofuran (THF), respectively (i.e. 100 mg MEEP/10 ml THF). PEO (Aldrich, MW 5×10^6) was dried under 1 mm vacuum at 50 °C for 24 h. then stored in a Vacuum Atmospheres dry box for use. $LiCF_3SO_3$ (Aldrich) was dried at 100 °C for 24 h. under vacuum. MEEP[9,10] was a generous gift from Professor H. R. Allcock at the Pennsylvania State University. The polymers were dissolved in CH_3CN or THF with 4:1 and 8:1 molar ratios of polymer repeat unit to electrolyte for MEEP and PEO, respectively. Solvents used were reagent grade and distilled from CaH_2 before use.

MICROELECTRODE MODIFICATION. The Pt microelectrode arrays used have been described previously[14] and consist of eight, individually addressable Pt microelectrodes each 70 μm long x 2.7 μm wide x 0.1 μm high with an interelectrode spacing of 1.4 μm. A small area of Ag epoxy was placed 300-500 μm from the array to be used as a counterelectrode in these experiments. Ag metal was then deposited on the characterized array. At least one electrode typically #1 or #8 was plated with Ag metal to act as a reference electrode under the solid electrolyte. Ag metal was selectively deposited by pulsing the desired electrodes from 0 V to -0.5 V vs. Ag wire in a commercial Ag cyanide plating bath (Transene Co.) for 1 to 2 s. The remaining electrodes were held at +0.2 V vs. Ag wire. Typical plating currents were

50-200 nA per electrode (~10 mA/cm^2). The Ag-coated microelectrode array devices were brought into the dry box, and 1 or 2 drops of polymer solution placed on the electrode surface. The devices were then placed in the antechamber of the drybox and dried by slowly evacuating the antechamber to an ultimate vacuum of 0.1 mm of Hg over 15 min. The devices were left under vacuum for an additional 1.5 h. The device was then brought back into the dry box, and fitted through a rubber septum into a round bottom flask in order to maintain an inert atmosphere above the device throughout the experiment. 20 μl of THF per 50 ml of N$_2$ atmosphere was injected as a "plasticizer" to increase ionic conductivity[2,4,5] and to insure a reproducible atmosphere. PEO experiments were done at elevated temperatures above the melting point (~67 $^{\circ}$C) of the polymer while the MEEP experiments were done at room temperature (~23 $^{\circ}$C).

CHARACTERIZATION TECHNIQUES. Auger electron spectra were obtained on a Physical Electronics 660 Scanning Auger Microprobe. Scanning electron micrographs were obtained on a Hitachi 5 800 instrument. Optical photography was taken on a Baush and Lomb MicroZoom microscope.

ELECTROCHEMICAL MEASUREMENTS. Electrochemical equipment consisted of a Pine Instruments, RDE4 bipotentiostat specially modified to include a 100 nA/V scale and with leads prior to the first stage amplifier shielded to the chassis ground. The electrochemical cell was enclosed by a Faraday shield or in the high temperature experiments

enclosed in a Will lab oven to stabilize the operating temperature. Signals were recorded on Kipp and Zonen BD 91 X-Y-Y' dual pen chart recorder or dual channel Nicolet 4904 Digital Collection Oscilloscope. Pulses were generated from a Princeton Applied Research, PAR 175 Universal Programmer. The Ag^+ solution experiment was performed in an aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ solution at 23 ^oC.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DIFFUSION IN LIQUID ELECTROLYTES

Figure 1 illustrates microelectrode transit time data recorded in aqueous 0.1 **M** $LiClO_4$ at 298 K. With reference to Scheme I, collection current vs. time is shown for two values of d, 9.6 μm and 17.8 μm, giving values of t_{mt} of 11.5 ms and 32.3 ms, respectively, for the Ag^+ experiment. Consistent with a diffusion process, the value of t_{mt} is found *experimentally* to be proportional to d^2 as illustrated in the inset of Figure 1. The inset of Figure 1 also gives t_{mt} vs. d^2 for experiments involving the diffusion of $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ where the $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ is generated by reduction of $Ru(NH_3)_6^{3+}$ at the generator.[1] The ratio of slopes of the plots of t_{mt} vs. d^2 for the Ag^+ and $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ gives the ratio of D for these two species, and equation (1) can be used to determine D. Our measurements give D = 2.3 x 10^{-5} cm^2/s and 7.8 x 10^{-6} cm^2/s for Ag^+ and $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ respectively,[15,16] results which agree well with previous measurements. The Ag^+ transit time experiment is somewhat different than the solution species experiment since the generation step involves stripping of confined redox material instead of generation from a solution species. In addition, the collection step truly collects the material at the electrode as opposed to collection being a change in redox state of a solution species. The Ag^+ experiments show that despite the differences in the nature of the redox

process, the diffusion of the solution species determines
the transit time and the shape of the collection curve.

SURFACE ANALYSIS

In earlier work on monitoring the diffusion of solution
species, it was determined that the best fit of the distance
dependence to transit time used a center to edge distance on
the microelectrode array.[1] Since the generator and
collector electrodes have a finite width relative to the
gap, it was unclear how far the majority of the species had
to travel. Although this empirical formula worked well in
the cases considered, direct experimental evidence
justifying its use was lacking. Optical microscopy of an
array after a Ag^+ microelectrode transit time experiment in
aqueous solution or in $MEEP/LiCF_3SO_3$ (vide infra) shows a
dark precipitate on the collector electrodes on the nearest
edge to the generator. This is diagrammed in Scheme II.
Figure 2 shows a scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of a Pt
array on which 5×10^{-8} C of Ag was deposited on electrode
#4 then anodically stripped by pulsing from -0.6 V to 1.2 V
vs. SCE in an aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ solution. The collector
electrodes, #2 and #6 (the second electrodes away) are held
at -0.6 V vs. SCE. In the SEM the deposition of the dark
precipitate is confirmed and the extent of the localization
on the collector electrode is shown. Auger analyses confirm
that the black precipitate on the collector electrodes and
the generator is indeed Ag. The Auger analysis also
confirms that Ag is deposited only on the edge of the

collector electrode nearest the generator, and not on the center or far edge or at electrodes not used as collectors. Since Ag is initially confined to the generator electrode and after the experiment localized on the closest edge of the collector electrodes, therefore Ag travels from generator to collector.

DIFFUSION IN SOLID ELECTROLYTES

The top portion of Figure 3 shows the generation-collection voltammograms for Ag^+ in MEEP/$LiCF_3SO_3$. The anodic curve represents the stripping voltammogram for Ag by scanning the Ag-coated Pt electrode from -0.5 V to 1.4 V vs. Ag electrode at 50 mV/s. The cathodic curve is the current for Ag^+ reduction monitored concurrently at two collector electrodes, symmetrically disposed 1.4 μm from the generator and held at -0.5 V vs. Ag quasi-reference electrode. This result shows that Ag^+ indeed travels from the generator to the collector electrodes in the polymer electrolyte.

The lower portion of Figure 3 shows the microelectrode transit time experiment in MEEP/$LiCF_3SO_3$. The collector current peak of 2.2 nA occurs at 3.15 s for the generation conditions used. Comparing the time for the maximum in collector current in aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ and $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP shows that the peak occurs ~3000 times later in the solid electrolyte, and $D = 5 \times 10^{-9}$ cm^2/s. The shape of the collector current vs. time plot (adjusted for height and width) is similar in both solid and liquid experiments to measure the diffusivity of Ag^+.

Transit time experiments have also been done in PEO/LiCF$_3$SO$_3$ media at 352 K. From experiments similar to those described above, we find t_{mt} = 240 ms. Using equation (1), D = 7 x 10^{-8} cm^2/s in this system.

COMPUTER SIMULATIONS

Earlier work on redox active ions in solution included simulating the microelectrode transit time experiment.[1] In those cases a semi-infinite boundary condition could be applied since the solution volume dimensions were greater than the critical diffusion lengths. We estimate polymer thickness to exceed 10 µm, but our studies lack accurate information on polymer thicknesses. Surface profilometry yields little information (the stylus cuts through the polymer) and the lack of density information on MEEP (solvent swollen or dry) and the irregularity of the area over which the polymer is spread also contribute to this information gap. To get a better perspective on the dependency of transit time on polymer thickness, digital simulations of such experiments were performed. The simulation is similar to that of the solution case with two exceptions.[1] First, the spatial resolution of the basis grid is more sensitive (i.e. 0.685 µm vs. 1.37 µm spacing for our 1.37 µm gap devices). Second, the boundary conditions are changed such that a reflective boundary is placed at a given distance from the array surface. This replaces the semi-infinite boundary of the solution simulation. The boundary is intended to model the interface

of the polymer with the atmosphere. This boundary is adjustable so that the collector response as a function of time can be simulated as a function of film thickness. The diffusing species is given a simulated diffusion coefficient of 1×10^{-8} cm^2/s.

The plot of the flux of collected species as a function of time is relevant to the observed experimental results (collector current vs. time) in the transit time experiments. Figure 4 shows the flux of collected species as a function of time for a number of simulated polymer thicknesses at a microelectrode array with symmetric, adjacent collectors. The top portion of this figure shows the flux profiles as a function of time for thicknesses of 27.4 µm, 10.96 µm, 6.85 µm and 4.11 µm. For 27.4 µm and 10.96 µm thicknesses the collection vs. time curves are identical. In the 6.85 µm case the flux profile shows increased collection around 15 s but the peak flux remains unchanged. At the 4.11 µm thickness the peak starts to broaden and below this limit the simulation shows significant differences from the semi-infinite case. This seems reasonable since the species would have to reach the boundary and return to the collector before the information relating to the thickness would be transmitted to the collector. Only when the thickness is on the order of the interelectrode spacing does the boundary condition affect the microelectrode transit time results. The lower portion of Figure 4 shows the collection fluxes vs. time for

boundary conditions of 2.055 and 2.74 μm as well as 4.11 μm for reference. The peak in the collection flux for the two conditions is severely distorted, though transit time measurements only change ~50% at most. This shows that only measurements with very thin films (less than the interelectrode spacing) would be subject to errors in our analysis of D.

CONCLUSION

Our results support the conclusion that microelectrochemical techniques can be useful in studies of physical diffusion in solid electrolytes. Results for the movement of Ag^+ in MEEP and PEO establish a methodology, but do not yet provide unambiguous conclusions regarding the actual diffusing species. Additional research will be required to establish details of the diffusion mechanism in solid polymer electrolytes using microelectrochemical methods. For a given system it is clear that meaningful information will result from measurements of t_{mt} as a function of temperature, electrolyte and its concentration, and the actual polymer used. The values of D reported herein show, as expected, that diffusion of Ag^+ is much slower ($\sim 10^3$) in MEEP or PEO than in aqueous solution. Additional microelectrochemical studies are in progress to investigate the factors influencing the diffusion of metal cations and new experimental methods are being developed for the study of both anionic and neutral species.

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16. D for $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ has been independently measured at a 25 μm microdisk electrode from the limiting steady-state currents.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Microelectrode transit time measurements of Ag^+ in 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ solution. (A) Collector current vs. time associated with the reduction of Ag^+ generated by a 2 ms pulse from 0.0 V to 1.4 V returning to 0.0 V vs. SCE at a Pt generator microelectrode coated with 2×10^{-12} moles of Ag metal separated from the collector by 9.6 μm. The Pt collector microelectrode is held at 0.0 V vs. SCE. (B) Collector current vs. time associated with a 10 ms anodic pulse under the same conditions as in (A) with the exception that the interelectrode separation is 17.8 μm. The inset shows the distance dependence of the time of the peak collection current at different collector electrodes for Ag^+ in 0.1 M $LiClO_4$ and also for 2.5 mM $Ru(NH_3)_6^{2+}$ in 0.1 M $NaClO_4$.

Figure 2. Scanning electron micrographs of a Pt microelectrode array consisting of eight electrodes (each 70 μm long x 2.7 μm wide x 0.1 μm high with an interelectrode spacing of 1.4 μm). 5×10^{-8} C of Ag was deposited on electrode #4 (electrodes are numbered 1-8, left to right, see **EXPERIMENTAL**) and then stripped by pulsing from -0.6 to 1.2 V vs. SCE three times for 10 ms each in an aqueous 0.1 M $LiClO_4$. The collector electrodes, #2 and #6, were held at -0.6 V. The rest of the microelectrode array was left "floating" (i.e. not under potentiostatic or

amperometric control). (Upper) Electrodes #2-8 are shown. (Lower) Electrodes #5 and #6 are shown closeup.

Figure 3. (Upper) Generation-collection voltammograms of Ag^+ in 1:4 $LiCF_3SO_3$:repeat unit of MEEP. The generator microelectrode was scanned from -0.5 V to 1.2 V vs. Ag quasireference electrode at 50 mV/s. Dual collector electrodes are symmetrically disposed about the generator and are 1.4 μm away from the generator. The collector electrodes were held at -0.5 V vs. Ag. (Lower) Collector current vs. time associated with the reduction of Ag^+ generated with a 2 s step of the Ag-coated Pt generator to +1.4 V and back to +0.6 V vs. Ag in the same $LiCF_3SO_3$/MEEP electrolyte.

Figure 4. Time vs. collection flux are shown for various reflective boundary conditions in a random walk simulation. The diffusion coefficient was taken to be 1 x 10^{-8} cm^2/s. (Upper) The reflective boundaries are taken as 27.4, 10.96, 6.85 and 4.11 μm from the generator. (Lower) The reflective boundaries are taken as 4.11, 2.74 and 2.055 μm from the generator.
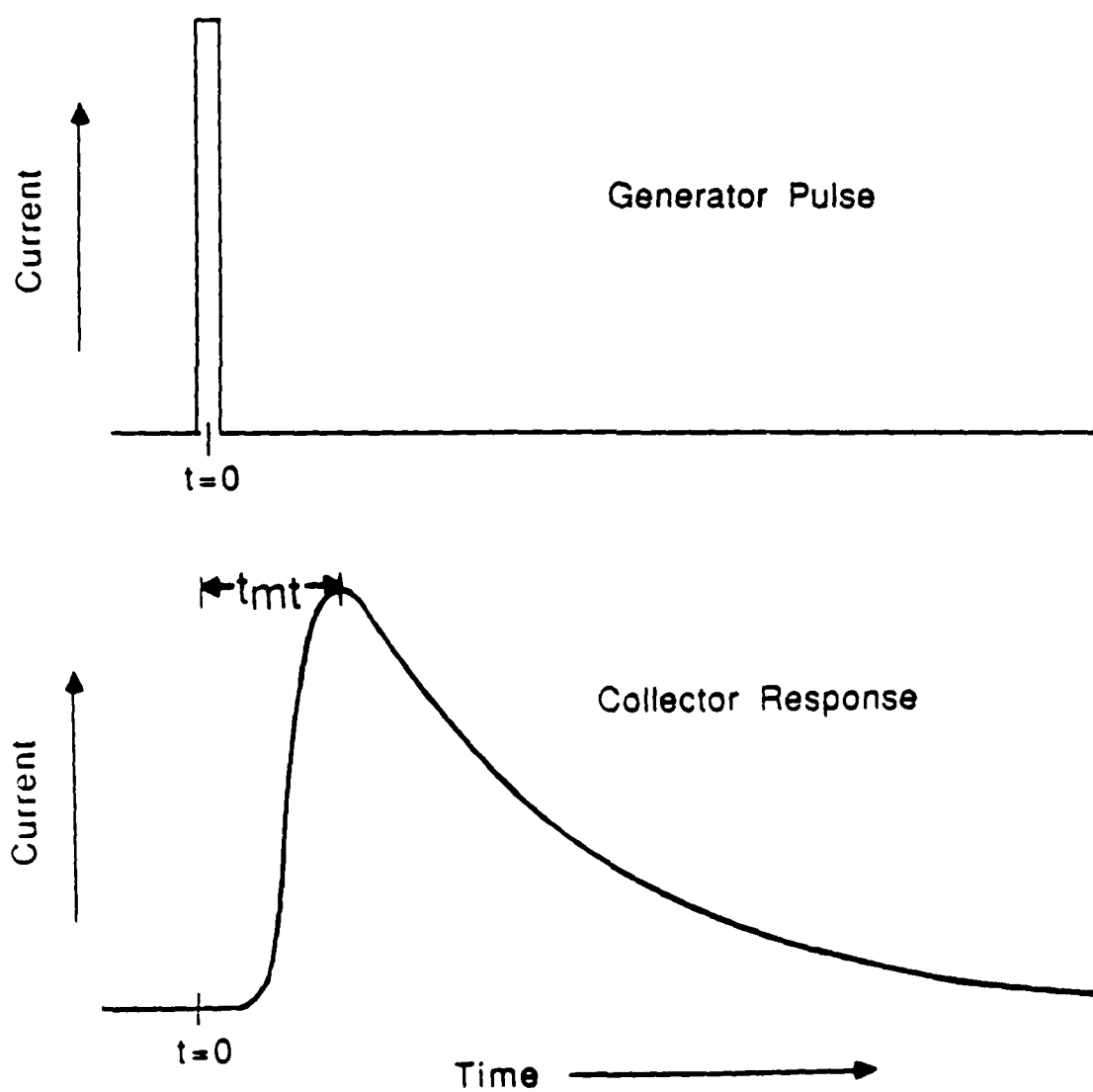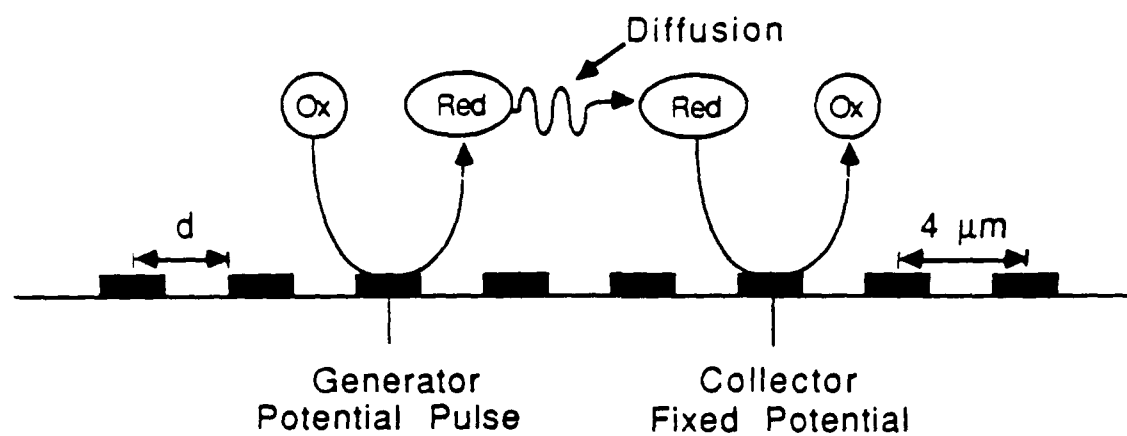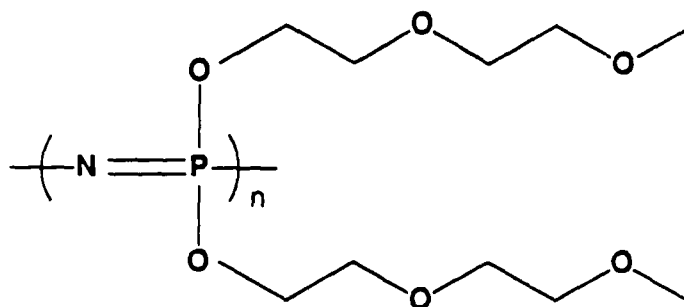
Scheme I. Experiment to measure diffusivity of electrogenerated species using a microelectrode array
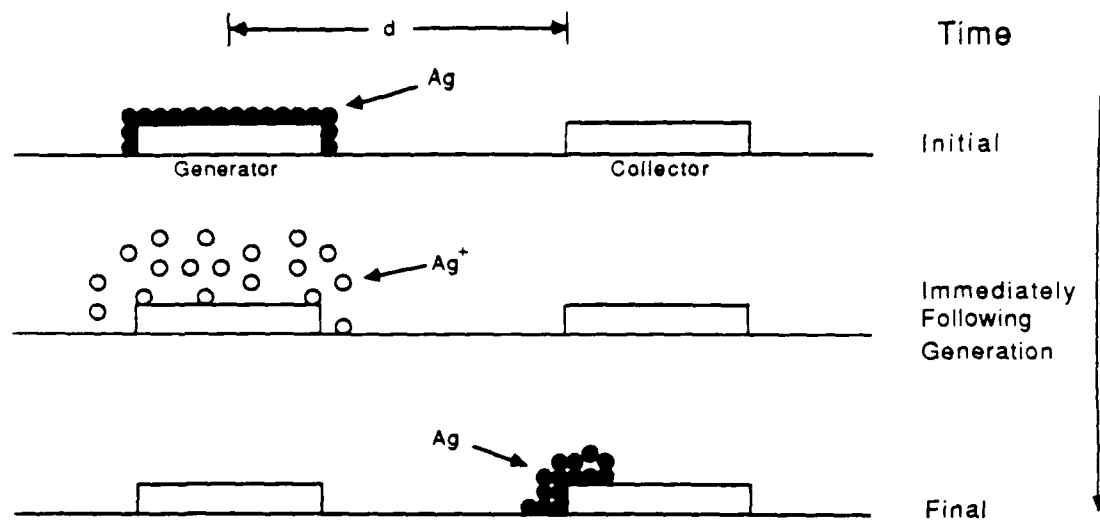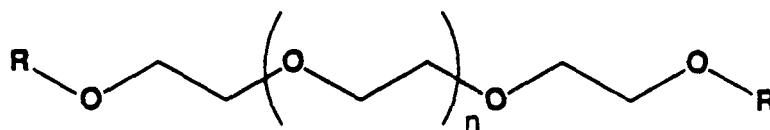
Scheme II. Experimental strategy for Ag^+ transit time determination

Poly[bis(2-(2-methoxyethoxy)ethoxy)phosphazene]
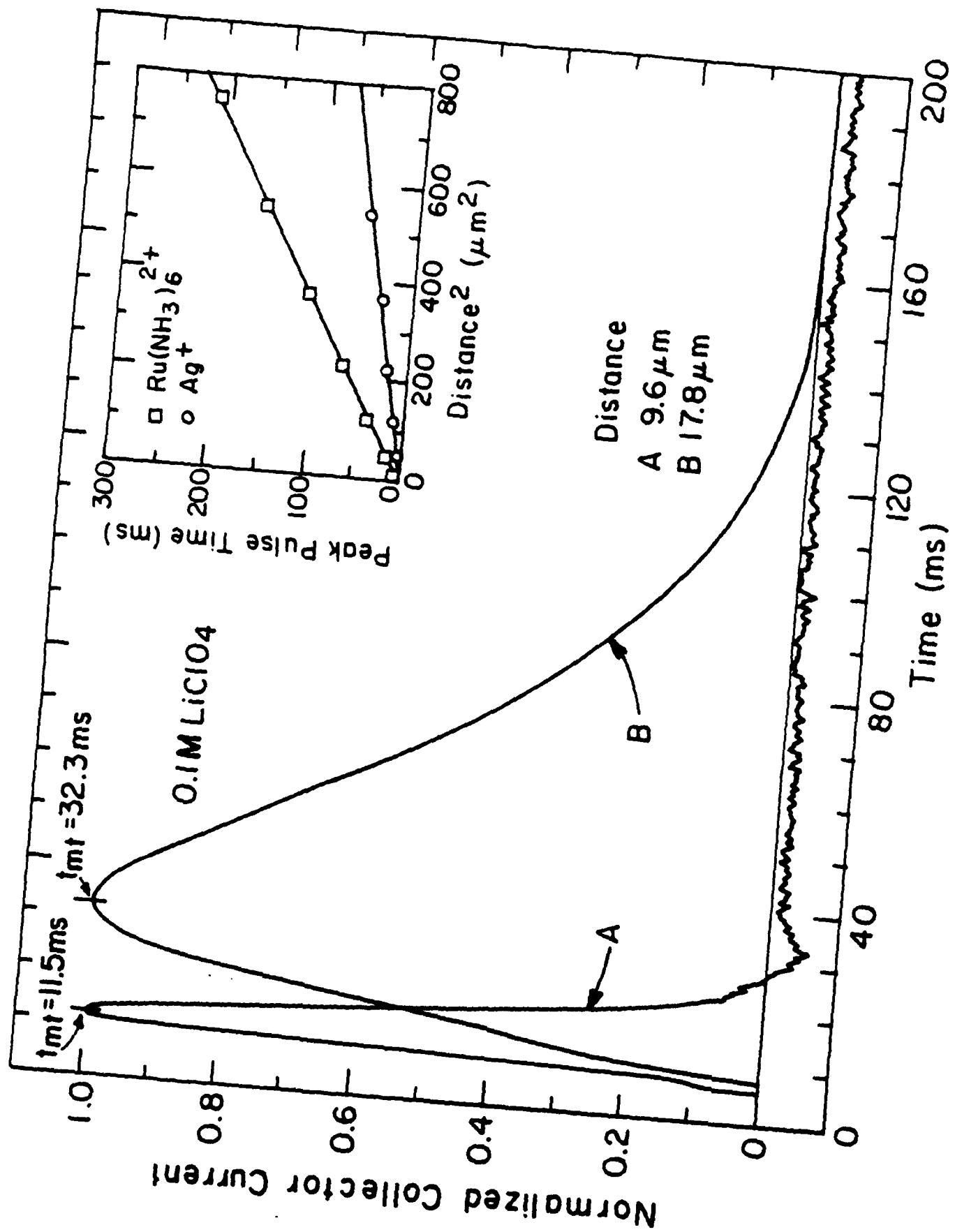
MEEP

Poly(ethylene oxide)
PEO

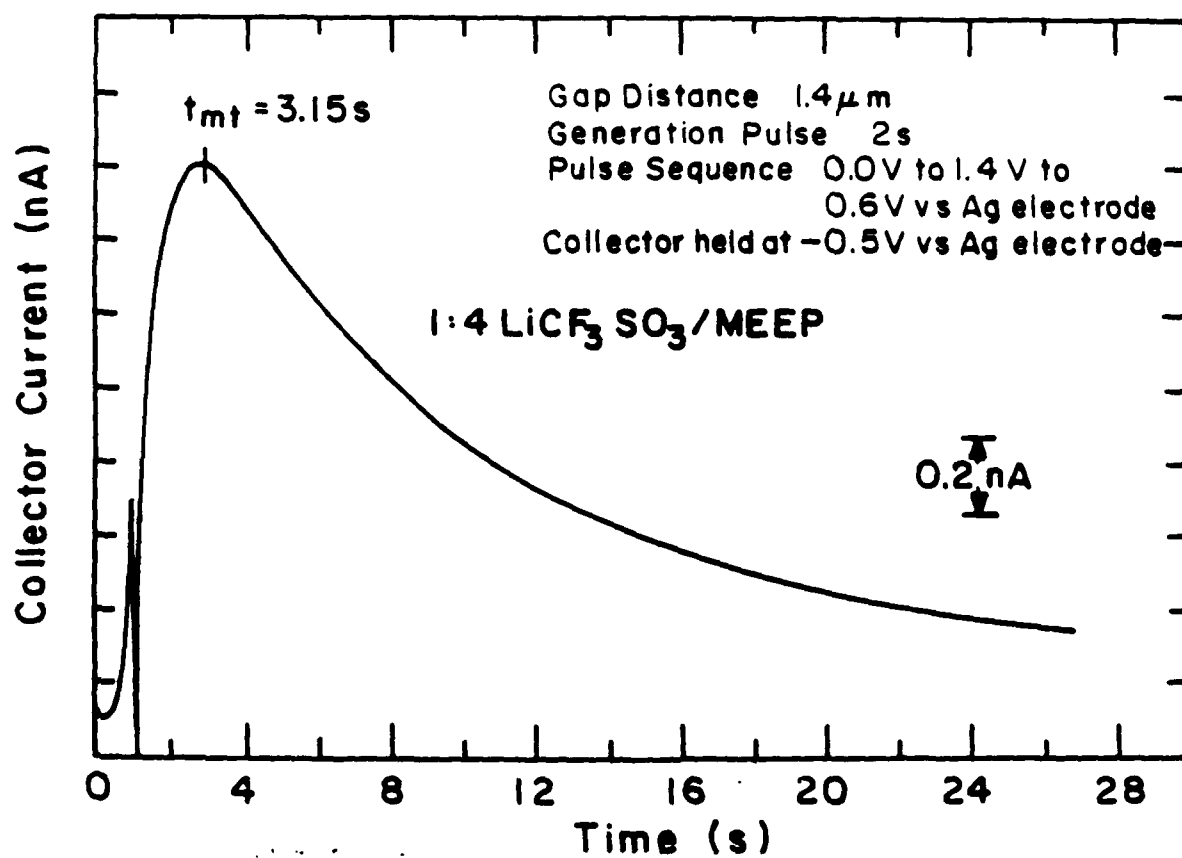Scheme III. Structures of MEEP and PEO

Normalized Collector Current

Time (ms)

$t_{mt} = 11.5$ms

$t_{mt} = 32.3$ms

0.1M LiClO$_4$

A

B

Distance
A 9.6 μm
B 17.8 μm

Peak Pulse Time (ms)

Distance^2 (μm^2)

□ Ru(NH$_3$)$_6$$^{2+}$
○ Ag$^+$

1:4 LiCF₃SO₃/MEEP

50 mV/s

Generator

10 nA

Collector held at -0.5 V vs. Ag electrode

2 nA

Current (nA)

Potential (V vs Ag electrode)

t_{mt} = 3.15 s

Gap Distance   1.4 μm
Generation Pulse   2 s
Pulse Sequence   0.0 V to 1.4 V to
0.6 V vs Ag electrode
Collector held at -0.5 V vs Ag electrode

1:4 LiCF₃SO₃/MEEP

0.2 nA

Collector Current (nA)

Time (s)

D = 1×10^{-8} cm^2/s
Electrode width = 2.74 μm
Electrode gap = 1.37 μm

4.11 μm

6.85 μm
10.96 μm
27.4 μm

2.055 μm
2.74 μm
4.11 μm

TIME (s)

COLLECTED SPECIES (/100)

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